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AUTOMOBILE CLUB OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

SHARON E. SUPPLE
 Vice President, Emergency Road Services
 (714) 885-1269

May 12, 2003

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
 Secretary
 Federal Communications Commission
 445 Twelfth Street SW
 Washington, DC 20554

Re: RM-10687

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The Automobile Club of Southern California (ACSC) and its subsidiaries, AAA Texas LLC, AAA New Mexico LLC and AAA Hawaii LLC, respectfully request that the Federal Communications Commission deny the Informal Request for Certification filed by the Industrial Telecommunications Association, Inc. (ITA) to coordinate Automobile Emergency Radio Service (AERS) frequencies.

ACSC is a not-for-profit organization that has been providing emergency road services for over ninety years. ACSC and its subsidiaries have over 6.5 million members in Inyo, Imperial, Kern, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Tulare and Ventura counties in Southern California, and in the states of Texas, New Mexico and Hawaii. ACSC has entered into an affiliation arrangement with AAA Northern New England, which serves another 700,000 members in the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. ACSC responds to over 4 million emergency road service calls per year in Southern California alone from motorists facing a wide variety of problems, many of which endanger the safety of drivers and their passengers.



Headquarters: LOS ANGELES • Administrative Offices: COSTA MESA
 Mailing Address: P.O. Box 25001, SANTA ANA, CA 92799-5001

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Relying on the efficiency of its radios, ACSC quickly dispatches towing operations to the scene of motor vehicle accidents or breakdowns so that road hazards can be cleared before secondary collisions occur. ACSC also assists motorists who are stranded or involved in accidents, and transports them from roadsides and highways where they may otherwise be vulnerable to harm from high speed vehicles or crime. Without question, ACSC's prompt response to roadside emergencies saves lives and property. Congress has emphasized the need for prompt emergency roadside assistance, citing a study that shows "while deaths from motor vehicle crashes have been declining in recent years, deaths at the scene [of an accident] prior to the arrival of emergency medical care have more than doubled in the past 20 years, totaling more than 20,000 [fatalities] per year."¹ These findings demonstrate that the public has a compelling need for reliable automobile emergency services provided by ACSC and its other AAA affiliated auto clubs.

The use of radios to coordinate emergency road response is vital. We have always relied on the American Automobile Association (AAA) to coordinate our use of the AERS frequencies, because AAA frequency coordinators are not just "familiar" with our operations, but have *expertise* concerning the radio operations involved in emergency road service. This is because AAA is first and foremost the nation's largest emergency road service and highway safety organization, and handles AERS frequency coordinations as an extension of this primary mission. AAA has consistently provided us with fast and reliable coordination service. Neither ITA nor any other frequency coordinator has the required expertise with the AERS channels. We cannot be assured that any other competing frequency coordinator will provide (or have the incentive to provide) this same level of protection. While ITA and other coordinators are generally driven by a profit motive, AAA is a not-for-profit entity concerned with the safety of public roadways.

In this regard, we are concerned by the "mass production" approach employed by large coordinators such as ITA, as a way to reduce costs and enhance speed of service. ITA's Informal Request for Certification (at page 7) claims that AERS systems "are identical to the systems that ITA has and continues to coordinate for our members and clients." This statement ignores the specialized nature of AERS systems, and indicates that our AERS coordination proposals will simply be "thrown into the hopper" and processed in the same fashion as an application for laundry truck radios. Our concern is reinforced by ITA's argument (at page 10)

¹ See H.R. Report No. 105-768, pt. 1 at 10 (1998).

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that competition in the coordination of AERS frequencies is appropriate because "a majority of communications systems in the radio services 'are used in a similar fashion – for support of day-to-day business activities.'" While the AERS channels are part of the larger Industrial/Business frequency pool, AERS operations are *not* used in a similar fashion to the majority of Industrial/Business radio systems. The majority of our communications deal with the retrieval of our members from a dangerous accident or breakdown scene, and the removal of disabled vehicles that create delays and the hazard of secondary collisions for the entire public. This is why the FCC designated AAA as the exclusive coordinator for AERS frequencies in 1999. Like AAR, UTC, and API, as well as the public safety coordinators, AAA provides a public safety function, and its AERS coordinations need to look at more than just which channel has fewest mobiles licensed.

AAA recognizes the importance of AERS operations, and is intimately familiar with the unique usage patterns and priority of communications associated with these operations. What may be viewed as "acceptable loading" on a typical Industrial/Business channel is not necessarily acceptable on an AERS channel, since AERS vehicles must stay in constant contact with the dispatcher, and in some cases with public safety officials. AAA helps to ensure that these important communications take place on an interference-free basis, by using a realistic assessment of the demands placed on a channel by AERS operators, and by avoiding the licensing of inconsistent users on the same channel.

In contrast, we had many negative experiences during the period when the AERS frequencies were being coordinated by entities other than AAA. In particular, the Automobile Club of Southern California and AAA Texas had to file numerous requests for denial or dismissal of applications filed with the Commission by other coordinators, because of the potential harm to AERS operations. See, e.g., July 6, 1999 Request for Dismissal filed against RF Data, Inc. application for 452.5875 MHz at Barstow, California (File No. D126221). In several cases, the protests were against commercial operators who simply applied to acquire as many channels as they could in a given area, without regard to the compatibility of their operations with AERS systems.

The need for AAA's exclusive expertise in coordinating the AERS channels is even more evident because of the increased risks of terror in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Southern California is particularly dependent on its highway system. If a terrorist attack took place in this area, it would be vital that

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AERS systems could operate without interference, because the highways are the primary evacuation routes, and must be kept clear of incidents. Aside from the terrorism threat, the risk of earthquakes in this area demands effective emergency road service operations.

In summary, we are completely satisfied with the high quality of service received from AAA, and see no need for additional coordinators in the AERS band. In fact, as discussed above, we are very concerned about the negative ramifications of allowing multiple coordinators for the AERS channels. For these reasons, we urge the Commission to deny the ITA Informal Request.

Respectfully submitted,


Sharon E. Supple, Vice President
Emergency Road Services

cc: FCC Commissioners
Chief, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau